

Big Cherry Reservoir

Ribbon Cutting Ceremony for Dam at Big Cherry Reservoir

Big Stone Gap, Virginia

July 6, 2005

I am pleased to return to Big Stone Gap today to participate with Town and Virginia officials in celebrating the completion of the new dam at the Big Cherry Reservoir.

The structure on which we are standing is truly a marvel of modern engineering design. The new dam will simultaneously provide protection from future flooding to the residents who live downstream from the reservoir and, through its expanded capacity, will enable the Town of Big Stone Gap to provide a reliable water supply to its neighboring communities in Wise County, the City of Norton and Scott and Lee Counties.

The project to construct a new dam at Big Cherry Reservoir began in 2001, following several news reports that highlighted the deteriorating condition of a number of dams which impound reservoirs across the Commonwealth. One news report in particular highlighted the deteriorated condition of the old dam which impounded the Big Cherry Reservoir. The dam has been in place since the turn of the last century and was in need of replacement.

Having been made aware of the condition of the dam at Big Cherry, my staff and I set to work with the Town of Big Stone Gap and with the United States Department of Agriculture's Rural Development office to obtain funding to address the safety concerns of citizens residing below the dam. The discussions rapidly led to a broader project to enable Bog Stone Gap to earn revenues by selling water from a larger reservoir to neighboring localities. We celebrate the completion of that larger combined project today.

At my request, \$7.05 million in federal funding has been provided for the \$8,226,830 dam project. The U.S. Department of Agriculture, through its Rural Development Agency, made three provisions of federal funding totaling \$5.75 million. In addition, a \$700,000 federal Community Development Block Grant, a \$200,000 federal grant from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, and a \$400,000 federal grant from the Appalachian Regional Commission were obtained to construct the new dam.

In addition to the federal sources of funding, the Tobacco Commission has provided a \$250,000 grant, and an application is pending with the Commission to supply an additional \$250,000 for the project. I am now working with the Town of Big Stone Gap to identify sources of funding which will make up the balance of \$676,830 that has been used to construct the new dam.

The new dam has been constructed approximately 200 feet downstream from the older dam structure. The new dam has

a spillway elevation of 82 feet, which is seven feet higher than the older structure, and is now capable of storing 50 percent more water than can be stored in the former Big Cherry Reservoir. The storage capacity has been increased by 200 million gallons, bringing the total storage volume to approximately 600 million gallons.

In addition to the greater measure of safety which the new dam will now afford to residents downstream, the new dam and expanded reservoir has created the additional water capacity necessary to enable the Town of Big Stone Gap to provide water supply to the City of Norton, the Town of Appalachia, the Town of Pennington Gap, the Dryden Water Authority, the Scott County Public Service Authority, the Lee County Public Service Authority and the Wise County Public Service Authority. At the present time, approximately 12,000 residents of Wise County receive water supplies from the Big Cherry Reservoir. The expanded reservoir will have the capability of providing water service to thousands more.

Interconnections between the Town of Big Stone Gap's water system and the systems serving the Town of Pennington Gap in Lee County and Scott County have already been established to allow the surrounding communities to begin to make use of the additional water supply. An interconnection with the City of Norton's water system is now nearing completion.

I want to commend the leadership of the Town of Big Stone Gap for this farsighted project. Mayor Bill Cole, former Mayors Ben Allen and Harold Kirk, the members of the Big Stone Gap Town Council, and George Polly, Big Stone Gap Town Manager, have provided outstanding leadership for the Town as this project has been constructed. Their work will benefit not only the residents of Big Stone Gap and its immediate environs but will also benefit the other communities in Wise, Lee and Scott Counties that I have mentioned.

I also want to thank Bobby Lane of Lane Engineering and Jeff Cowan and Warren Hayden of Dewberry and Davis for lending their expertise to the design of the newly completed dam.

I also want to recognize John Phillippe and Tom Roberts of the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation for their patient and cooperative efforts in conjunction with Town officials to see this project through to completion.

Thanks are also due to Tom Gray, Director of Water Programs for the Virginia Department of Health, and Ron Flanary and his excellent staff at the LENOWISCO Planning District Commission for the tremendous amount of work which they provided in partnership with the Town of Big Stone Gap in conducting the feasibility and engineering studies and in working with my office to obtain funding for the project.

I want to thank Sally Hamer, Area Manager of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Rural Development office, and Bill Shelton, Director of the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development, for their strong support and able assistance in obtaining the necessary federal funding.

I also want to recognize Virginia Delegate Terry Kilgore and Virginia Senator William Wampler for their strong support of this project. I thank them for urging that Tobacco Commission funding be provided and thank them for their continued efforts to lessen the financial burden of this project for the Town of Big Stone Gap.

Finally, I want to thank my District Director, Laura Lee, for her persistent and persuasive work as we pressed the case to obtain federal funding .

The new dam at the Big Cherry Reservoir is an example of what can be achieved when citizens and government officials at the local, state and federal levels work together and cooperate in aid of a common purpose. For that cooperation and successful work in constructing the new dam, I want to commend everyone involved and offer special congratulations to the residents near the Big Cherry Reservoir who will receive the greater measure of safety provided by the new dam.